

A Field Guide To:

A Place to Lay My Head

The MFA Thesis Exhibition
Klapper Gallery, Queens College



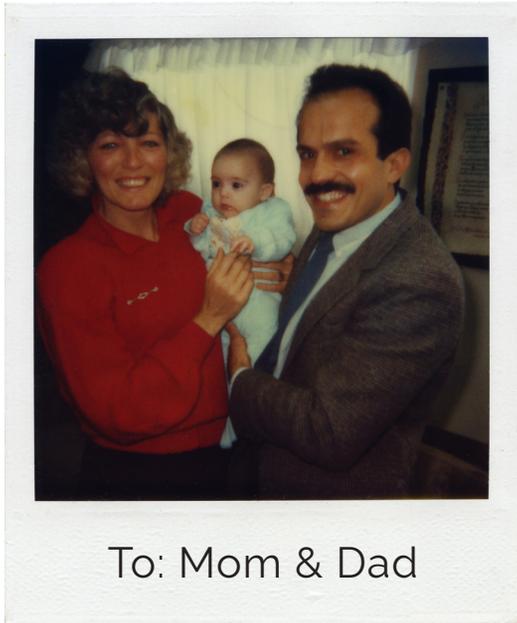
Cristina Ferrigno

A Field Guide to: A Place to Lay My Head
Queens College MFA Thesis Exhibition
First Edition
April 26th, 2022

@cmferrigno



Cristina Ferrigno



Land Acknowledgement

In New York City, we live on the unceded land of the Lenape people. Both Bogotá and Choachí are located on the unceded land of the Muisca people. I ask you to join me in acknowledging the Lanape and Muisca communities, their elders, as well as their past, present & future generations.

I want to take a moment to recognize the violence and the effects of colonization. Native and indigenous peoples still exist all over the world, in the Americas and here in New York. Native people face very real, very pressing issues today, like water access, land rights, deforestation, cultural and language loss, extreme violence against women, and the separation of children from their tribes and heritage. This acknowledgement demonstrates a commitment to beginning the process of working to dismantle the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.



Special Thanks

My QCMFA cohort, professors Greg Sholette, Chloë Bass and Glenn Goldberg. and my school bestie Ari for writing & editing help.

SPCUNY community: Shout out to Connor, Erin, and Quinlan!

Install Team: My BFF Spencer, Ari, Quinlan, Connor, and Michael who all came through in a big way!

Colombian Crew: Niceli Portugal & Edan Mohr with Escuelita en Casa. Gloria & Fabio who were our wonderful hosts and guides, Marta and her restaurant, Sergio, Rodrigo & the other educators, women, and kids we worked with in Choachí.

Thank you all for your love & support!



Field Guide Zine Conclusion

I hope this field guide zine helped illuminate some thoughts, facilitated the act of exploration, and helped one appreciate the beauty and frustration of simple questions with complicated answers. In making this body of work, curating it, installing it, sitting in it, and taking it down, I've discovered a lot of new things about myself and my practice. Seeing it all together and having to articulate my work in multiple formats multiple times, thoughts, ideas and realizations came into sharper relief.

I'm still dealing with some remnants like how to get my coffee table back to my apartment, what to do with all the pinecones, or where am I going to store these giant beautiful prints. More philosophic or personal questions creep in but I think I need a breather before I address them. This summer, I hope to continue experimenting, learning and searching for where I am and where I want to be. I hope that at least some of the answers to those questions can be illuminated to me, in my weeks, months, and years out of the QCMFA program.

Being able to open up new avenues for questioning is something I love about being an artist and an explorer. An interest in the Human Condition is perhaps a lesser way of explaining my work. Maybe it's sociological, anthropological, or some other ology? I don't necessarily need to categorize it, other than it being "Art, with a capital A."



Introduction / Thesis Statement

In creating and installing my MFA Thesis Show, *A Place to Lay My Head*, I've been thinking a lot about the core principles of my work. My practice is essentially, an on-going, personal investigation of the lifelong questions surrounding my feelings of cultural "in betweenness" as a Colombian transnational adoptee. Being an educator and socially engaged artist, I want to involve different communities in this work of dissecting the strands of what makes up Latinx identity. I enjoy investigating the overlaps in life experiences of others with my own, but I also find that I am interested in the discourse and nuance that emerges when posing these questions to other people. I'm extremely open with my history, and folks who've responded to the work have been generous with sharing theirs. I'm not really looking for a singular static answer, but rather the multifaceted truths that arise from the process of asking questions both to myself and others.

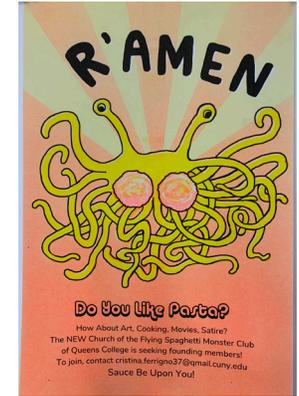


I oscillate between working on larger-scale, public projects and more specific, internal reflections. The movement between the two allows for greater nuance and multiplicity. The public projects often result in sub-projects,

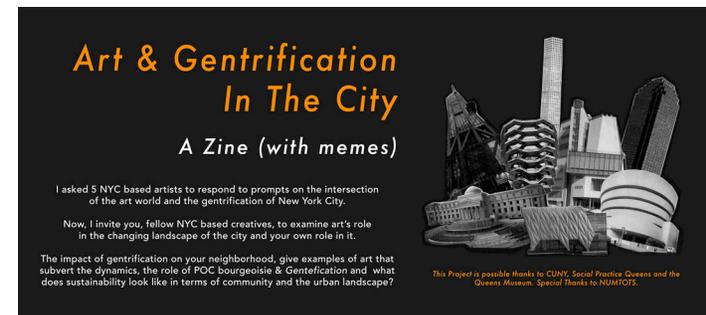


such as zines, photo series, archives of objects, or socially engaged events like workshops, talks, public programs, or gallery exhibits. This variety of modes and methods makes working around these central questions more interesting for me, but it also provides a more comprehensive look at these issues—including other ways of asking the same questions. Being an interdisciplinary artist helps me stay nimble with my practice, which utilizes whatever strategy is best for a given situation and its particular constraints.

In my individual practice, I focus on more specific, internal questions and solo processes. This ranges from intentional walks in search for signs and symbols of identity within a particular neighborhood, to delving into personal grief, or maintaining a sense of self care through ritual and collection. Examples of the latter include experimental fiber pieces, or sculpting with clay. Installation is a new approach for me, it offers a means of weaving public and private ideas together, generating a sense of place, exploration, and discovery in a curated space. The Field Guide zine I made for this exhibit serves as a way to learn more about the work, while providing insights into my process, but it also offers a way to preserve the exhibit in a format that is itself a piece of art.



Handout “Alphabet Pasta” photos and printed pamphlets promoting the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. This was a project I started my first year (pre-pandemic) and it brought me some joy, so I continued with it and have since made sculptures, vestiments and risograph posters.



Art & Gentrification in the City: A Zine With Memes (2019) is about the intersection between the art world and gentrification in NYC. How do they overlap and where? How do we as artists avoid perpetuating the cycle of beautification and displacement? I sent questions to a few well known artists, including Chloë Bass, Claire Bishop, Greg Sholette and more, to weigh in on these topics through the lens of a responsible and socially engaged art practice.



Zines Descriptions

All Things Must Pass (2021) started with the question of how a public program at a museum could take the form of a zine. This is an “activity zine” designed for participation, contemplation and support on the topic of different forms of grief we’ve held during the pandemic. This was designed for and printed at the Queens Museum’s Exhibition, *Art as Social Practice: 10 Years of Social Practice Queens*.

The *Pressed Flowers Prints* (2021) were handcut linoleum prints made for the cover of the grief zine using floral motifs found on headstones.

The risograph zine *Pressed Flowers* (2021) came about because I wanted to share the individual images of the lino blocks I made and the story, research, and meaning behind the imagery.

The *New York/San Francisco* (2021) zine was a collaboration with Hunter MFA artist Althea James for our Governor’s Island summer risograph printing class. We each collaged images of our city’s waterways, parks, architecture and transportation to talk about how our cities function, evolve and change.

“A Place to Lay My Head”

“A Place to Lay My Head” was originally the title I gave to a series of works using pillows. I started sewing as a self care practice. I initially utilized sewing as something I do while watching TV. It is a meditative process that provides tangible improvements to my life, such as a pair of mended pants. However, it also exists as a medium that I experiment with and learn about in a free-form, low-pressure way. Pillows not only signify rest, but also home and safety-- a place of belonging. They are an elementary sewing project that I first learned to make as a child, and something I enjoy making for practical and decorative purposes that now expand my abilities. The idea for the title and pillows came to me at the same time, over the summer, while experimenting in my studio and thinking about the dual nationalities of adoptees who were brought to the US without personal agency.



I had also been thinking of flags as a symbol of certain aspects of identity. While I’m not necessarily talking about nationalistic pride, there is something inherently interesting to me about communicating one’s place of origin, in a purely visual way. The hand-embroidered NYS flag pillow is still in progress and represents my upbringing far better than an American flag could. Being a New Yorker, there’s a badge of pride, but also a sense of exasperation, and of exhaustion that comes with it. My parents (both native New Yorkers,) and my progressive public education, taught me a healthy skepticism towards authority and blind nationalism. I think because of this, my interest in the study of flags (vexillology) as signs of identity, conflicts in a very interesting way with my political ideals and personal ethos.





Walking Archive Project

I've always had a penchant for collecting things, a practice that I've incorporated into my art-making. I desire to understand the relationship between place and identity. In my recent project Walking Archive, I go about this exploration in a few specific ways. I've been taking intentional walks and capturing images in neighborhoods that I have a personal or cultural connection to. So far, I've walked in Gravesend, Park Slope, and Greenwood

Cemetery all in Brooklyn, as well as Corona and Jackson Heights' "Little Colombia" in Queens. I've been looking for signs and symbols-- indicators of identity in these neighborhoods. In addition to the photographic series, I form collections of objects found on these walls. I ask myself: what stories can objects and images tell about a place and the people in it?

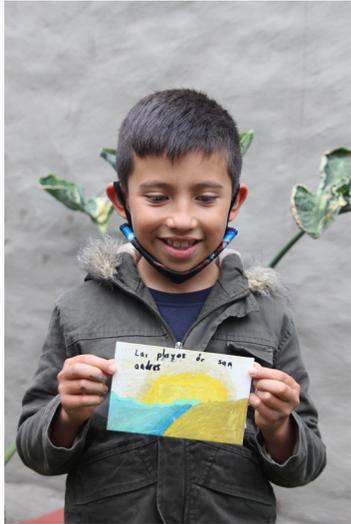
I'm attracted to items from the natural world as well as man made things because both seem



Zines & Printed Things

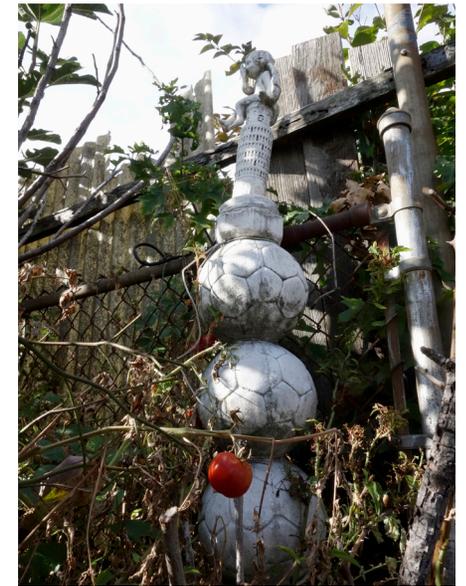
To conclude this Field Guide, I'd like to talk a little bit about the zine format and various kinds of printing processes. With the research based and socially engaged nature of my work, I find that printing is an easy and usually affordable way to disseminate art, writing and other types of information. For me, this often results in work produced by printing a digital file with a simple laser printer, hand cut lino prints, drawn or collage handmade booklets, or printed works using a risograph machine (a cross between silkscreening and photocopying.)

In my undergraduate studies, I took a bookbinding class, leading to a long term interest in the medium. Over the past 14 years, I've produced a large and varied collection of zines, prints, flyers, posters, and artist books. I enjoy this format because it can be stylistically and conceptually about anything and produced in a variety of ways. I've made zines about culture, language, gentrification, grief, and New York City. They can be a standalone project or artwork, but I also find them to be a great supplement to any larger project. If you would like to explore more of my zines, they are available on my website. Most of my digital zines, including this one, are available for download or DIY printing.



to hold a history. I'm interested in what these objects and places can divulge about identity, as indicators of class, gender, age, race and so on. I photograph these objects in their original context before I remove them, thus fabricating micro-narratives for them in a process assigning value and significance to mundane things.

This process has also given me a new understanding of urban spaces. New York is a living entity, and so the discarded objects or pieces of nature as things that go through cycles similar to that of life and death, this results in almost sanctifying them as relics of the city. I intentionally lean into those feelings of nostalgia, but also feelings of grief. There is an invisible tension between me and these collections because they provide something intangible that draws us together. Perhaps this power of attraction resides within the object itself?





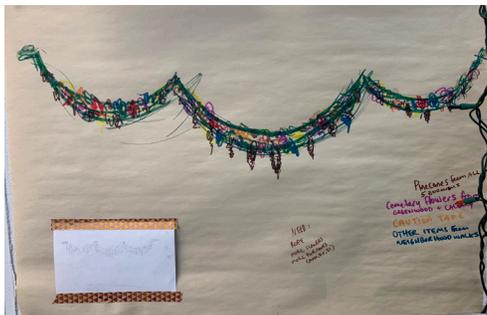
Collections, Garland & Wreath

The garland concept was conceived last summer while I was walking and collecting pine cones from almost every NYC borough (I never made it to Staten Island). However, this garland shown here ended up being a smaller scale project with more defined constraints that helped me refine some ideas around site and temporal specificity, since these items were all collected on a singular walking journey from the Queens Museum to my studio on the Queens College campus.



I didn't intentionally set out to make a work that day, but as I was walking through Flushing Meadow Park, my starting point, I felt the urge to pick things up that caught my interest. It was at that moment that I conceived of having a start and end point while creating a particular collection, underscoring the linearity of the garland's form.

It was an exercise in meandering, as I wasn't entirely sure how to get across the highways to the next green space which was Mount Hebron Cemetery. While wandering, I was thinking of the local histories of Flushing Meadow Park, its



of portrait requests, and group photos as well. It's important to me that whoever I'm working with can co-create alongside me, and that includes changing documentation into collaborative photographs. In creating any of these projects it is important to me that anyone participating, would because they wanted to engage. Opening up possibilities of learning and creating together.



In a different workshop consisting of a smaller group of variously aged kids, I utilized the canvas boards that I brought with me. My prompt was simple, I asked them to draw or write about what Colombia means to them. I was able to have them make multiple paintings and photograph each child with their work. It's important to me that children, especially, have fun and get to keep their artwork, particularly if it was made individually versus in a collaborative project. I like using photography in this way because the kids get to keep their paintings, but I've made a series of portraits that show their paintings.



I'm so happy to be able to share some of the work the kids made, as well as some of the photographs of them actively participating. I plan on making multiple prints along with a bunch of zines to send to my new friends in Colombia.



Socially Engaged Work

While in Choachí, I was able to work alongside artist/educator Niceli Portugal and her organization, *Escuelita En Casa* (Little School at Home.) . We were able to visit a rural school and lead workshops, socially engaged participatory projects, and discuss our work with the children (k-12) and also their professors. We didn't know what resources we would have when we got there, if it was open to the public in a square for example or if we would be working with a pre-selected audience. The circumstances were tricky to plan for a particular project so I concentrated on mediums and working styles that might be the most adaptable to uncertain or changing situations. In light of this, I brought a few yards of unprimed canvas, plus some small canvas boards, acrylic markers, my digital SLR camera and a few different basic project possibilities.

As a photographer, taking digital pictures is also a very flexible medium, there really aren't a lot of space constraints and it could be used for documentation as well as making individual works of art. With my camera at the school, my intention was to take pictures of kids as they interacted with the work, but I ended up getting a lot

place in the city and its role to the public. The lack of pedestrian walkways is due to the Robert Moses imposed knot of highways, which inhibit both public transit access and a safe way to walk from one area to another.

Mount Hebron turns into Cedar Grove cemetery and I continued to explore and pick up items of interest: blown away cemetery flowers, bird feathers, pine cones, and leaves. Continuing my journey to campus, I walked along residential streets. This brought about new lines of thought around space: public versus private spaces, ceremonial and recreational, institutional and social.



With all the things I've collected, I've wondered about the histories of each object, their stories and life cycles. My practice displaces the objects from their original context, and yet it also simultaneously preserves and destroys them. As with previous projects, I've come to see that collecting can be a way to not only form an archive of objects but a record of data and thoughts.

While installing the garland, the wreath titled, *Welcome/Caution*, and my other collections in my thesis exhibition, I wanted to emulate the feeling of walking, wandering, and thinking. I also wanted to convey a sense of grief-- sorrow and reverence for the objects, for ever-changing places and for people who have traversed similar paths.





Personal & Natural Histories

The connection between place and identity can be extended to one's connection to the land. How have our actions as humans affected the land that we live on? What effects do wars, colonialism, capitalism, and the patriarchy inflict on the earth? What's the historical anthropocene of a particular place and what effect does that specific landscape have on us as humans in turn? Some answers to these questions have actual scientific data available to inform them, while others may be philosophical ideas, spiritual beliefs, or incredible artistic works, like the speculative novel, *The Word for World Is Forest* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1972).

I examine these issues surrounding the Capitalocene, as a socially engaged artist and art history nerd, intersectional feminist, and amateur earth science enthusiast. These questions have been rolling around my head individually and in



uses of the different plants in the local ecosystem. Choachí has an abundance of eucalyptus, a non native tree. I've never encountered eucalyptus in the wild, but its scent is a favorite of mine and one I turn to for relaxation and renewal.

In gathering leaves from trees at Fonté, stones from the river and clay from the earth— bits and pieces of the landscape— am I reclaiming something lost, or am I taking more from a country that westerners have already pillaged and depleted? Am I Ansel Adams photographing the National Parks, or am I entertaining a fantasy of manifest destiny and exoticism? I don't have an answer, but I do feel that by incorporating natural elements from my place of origin in this installation, I can begin to understand myself in new, complex ways. As an adoptee, I often have to fight for my place within the Latinx diaspora. While there, it felt like a give-in that Colombia was simply in my blood, which was a most welcome revelation.



insecurity, and questioning that transnational adoptees naturally feel about their birth cultures. There's a deeply felt shame in not being able to speak Spanish fluently, a grief in having been removed from the culture of my birth, and an intense feeling of mystery, exploration, and continual learning around one's place in the world.

Hiking up Fonté with my art educator friends and a high school biology teacher from the area was a magical experience despite having some difficulties. As a city kid, I struggled with

not only the rocky terrain and altitude of the mountain, but also the language barrier. However, with my limited Spanish, I was able to ask questions and learn about a specific type of fungi that only grows on that mountain. I ate wild berries, tasted and smelled leaves, picked flowers and learned about the medicinal and cultural



conjunction with similar queries for as long as I can remember. This collection of works and my thesis exhibition installation are the closest I've gotten to articulating them so far. When looking inward, the philosophical transforms the personal. I've come to realize that I am a product of a much larger system, a system in which the Adoption Industry exists. Adoption, in particular, is an institution that encompasses many global, systemic, and human issues while also having an enormous and immediate impact on the lives of individuals of different generations, races, classes and genders simultaneously through the practice of exporting and importing children.



Maybe, displacing these objects is a way for me to explore this within myself. I do this through the process of taking an object of interest out of its place of origin and recontextualizing and categorizing it either into a collection or

as a standalone object of curiosity. I try to infer histories from its appearance, for example, the methods scientists use to identify and date rocks based on the natural histories of the earth. Some histories even involve separate





entities coming into contact with each other, as with insects in amber: it's a record, it's an object, it's a living thing in a state between preservation and decay. Autonomy is revoked by interacting with some other foreign entity, its natural state is forever changed.

I'm looking for what these things do when placed next to each other in a collage of objects or a facsimile of a vitrine in a natural history museum. What happens when I place my "Little Bear," a stuffed animal that was given to me to hold on the plane from Bogota to New York City in 1987, next to a rock from the Andes that's 10s of millions of years old? What kinds of sparks fly from juxtaposing vastly different elements of place and time? These are the questions I pose to myself and others who may be artists, academics, participants, or other knowledge seekers. I certainly don't have any concrete answers, but I'm curious and I hope to make others curious as well.



Inglés / English

Chiguachí, that was the original name of the town we know today as Choachí.

Chiguachí in the Muisca language means "Our Mount Moon", a graphic idea of the location of the territory for the muisca on a hill where the moon was worshiped. With the passage of time and the arrival of the Spaniards, Chiguachí became what we know today as Choachí.

It is believed that on September 29, 1560, the soldier Antonio Bermúdez, companion of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada was sent as "encomendero" of the lands of the Ebaque chief, was assigned Chiguachí, so he founded Choachí.

Although the exact date of its foundation is uncertain because there are those who say that the celebration of September 29 corresponds to a false date and that Choachí was founded in 1564. In 1601 and as part of the

evangelizing mission of the Spaniards the parochial temple is built.

Choachí is located 38 kilometers from Bogotá and is linked to the city from the west by a fully paved road, to the south it borders the municipality of Ubaque that is ten kilometers away, to the east with the municipality of Fómeque at 16 kilometers and to the north with La Calera. The urban area is divided into five sectors and the rural area into 34 veredas.

Some attractions of interest:

- Saint Michael Archangel Parish
- German Pardo Garcia House of Culture
- La Chorrera and Chiflon waterfalls
- Sevia Lagoon
- Green Cross wasteland
- Santa Monica Hot Springs

Fonté

One of the most immediate and striking differences between NYC and Bogotá are the vast surrounding mountains. Choachí, about forty-five minutes to one hour outside of Bogotá, is a town that's actually lower in altitude and located in a valley. The indigenous Muisca people worshiped the moon and called it Chiguachí, meaning "Our Mount Moon." It was, like most of South America, colonized by the Spanish in the mid 1500s, and was at that point renamed Choachí.

While traveling in this space, I was also coming back to my birth country for the first time as an adult (after approximately 30 years). I experienced a lot of feelings, some were not easily identifiable. I struggled with reconciling the brutal history of colonialism and my internal battles regarding privilege, belonging, and a kind of birthright to the land. Where was the difference between being a tourist, being a colonist, or coming back to a home I never knew? I've felt similarly in some neighborhoods in New York while photographing and exploring these urban spaces. This sense of ownership or belonging to a place is tricky for me due to the perpetual doubt,